

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 1537

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT: ANALYSIS OF PRESENT SITUATION

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 1324, 1366, 1457

BEGIN SUMMARY. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THE EVENTS OF THE PAST TWO WEEKS WILL FORCE CHIEF OF STATE LOPEZ TO RESIGN. THE NEW MILITARY LEADERSHIP EXHIBITS NO UNIFIED IDEOLOGICAL TENDENCY OTHER THAN A BELIEF THAT POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC QUESTIONS MUST BE RESOLVED WITHIN AN "HONDURAN" CONTEXT. THEY ARE YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED AND THEY MAY TAKE PRECIPITOUS DECISIONS WITHOUT CAREFUL CONSIDERATION OF ALL THE FACTORS INVOLVED IN COMPLEX GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES. END SUMMARY.

1. THE COMBINATION OF THE MILITARY REORGANIZATION OF MARCH 31, WHICH REMOVED GENERAL LOPEZ AS CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES, AND THE BREAKING OF THE UNITED BRANDS BRIBE SCANDAL ON APRIL 8 HAS CHANGED GREATLY THE HONDURAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE. THE MARCH 31
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MEETING OF THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL PLACED

COLONEL JUAN ALBERTO MELGAR IN LOPEZ' FORMER POSITION OF CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES BUT ALLOWED LOPEZ TO REMAIN AS CHIEF OF STATE. IN FACT, THE LT. COLONEL'S GROUP PRESENTED LOPEZ WITH AN ULTIMATUM INVOLVING A COMPLETE REORGANIZATION OF THE TOP LEVEL OF THE OFFICER CORPS WHICH LOPEZ FELT OBLIGED TO ACCEPT. LOPEZ' ACCEPTANCE ON MARCH 31 SIGNALLED THE PASSING OF THE POWER OF THE "OLD GUARD COLONELS" AND THE RISE TO POWER OF THE YOUNGER GROUP OF LT. COLONELS IN THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL. IT ALSO CLEARLY SIGNALLED THE END OF LOPEZ' PERSONAL AUTHORITY OTHER THAN AS AN AGENT OF THE NEW MILITARY LEADERSHIP.

2. A BASIC QUESTION AT THE TIME OF THE MILITARY CHANGE CONCERNED LOPEZ' FUTURE ROLE. IT WAS APPARENTLY RECOGNIZED BY THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE CONCIL THAT EVENTUALLY HE WOULD HAVE TO STEP DOWN TO ALLOW THE SELECTION OF A NEW CHIEF OF STATE. HOWEVER, THIS PROBLEM WAS NOT TREATED AT THE TIME BECAUSE THERE WAS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE QUESTION WOULD SOON BECOME CRITICAL. ON APRIL 8 THE UNITED BRANDS SCANDAL WHICH IMPLICATED LOPEZ AND OTHER GOH OFFICIALS BROKE IN THE PRESS. THIS INTRODUCED A TOTALLY NEW ELEMENT INTO THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP. THEY ARE BIENG FORCED INTO CONSIDERING LOPEZ' ROLE MUCH EARLIER THAN THEY HAD EXPECTED WHEN THE MILITARY CHANGES WERE INSTITUTED ON MARCH 31.

3. AS STATED IN PREVIOUS TELEGRAMS TO THE DEPARTMENT, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT LOPEZ WILL RESIGN OR WILL BE REMOVED IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THE LT. COLONEL'S CAME TO POWER ON A PLATFORM WHICH INCLUDED A PLEDGE OF "CLEAN GOVERNMENT" AND THEY CAN HARDLY ALLOW LOPEZ TO REMAIN AS CHIEF OF STATE WITHOUT CALLING THEIR OWN CREDENTIALS INTO QUESTION. IN ADDITION, THERE IS EVERY REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THEY WILL REMOVE MOST OF THE PRESENT CABINET MEMBERS FROM OFFICE.

4. A BASIC PROBLEM FOR THE LT. COLONEL'S GROUP IS HOW TO EFFECT THE CHANGE. THEY WILL CERTAINLY ENDEAVOR
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TO OBTAIN THE RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE BEFORE THOSE RESULTS ARE MADE PUBLIC. THIS WOULD GIVE THEM TIME TO DETERMINE HOW BEST THEY CAN REMOVE LOPEZ WITHOUT CREATING FURTHER PROBLEMS FOR THEMSELVES AND THE COUNTRY. COL MELGAR, WHOSE POSITION NOW APPEARS TO BE MORE SECURE THAN EARLIER BELIEVED, IS A LIKELY CANDIDATE TO REPLACE LOPEZ AS CHIEF OF STATE. THERE ALSO IS SOME TALK OF

A JUNTA AS A POSSIBLE TRANSITION GOVERNMENT. APPARENTLY NO SERIOUS CONSIDERATION IS BEING GIVEN AT THIS TIME TO EARLY ELECTIONS.

5. AGAIN AS REPORTED IN TELEGRAMS TO THE DEPARTMENT, THE LT. COLONEL'S GROUP IS NOT GUIDED BY ANY COMMON IDEOLOGICAL VIEWS. THERE ARE INDIVIDUALS WITHIN THE NEW MILITARY LEADERSHIP WHO ARE INFLUENCED BY VARIOUS POLITICAL TENDENCIES RANGING ACROSS THE SPECTRUM FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, WITH THE BALANCE PROBABLY NEAR CENTER. HOWEVER, THE ONLY "IDEOLOGICAL" CONCEPT WHICH UNIFIES THEM IS THAT SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS MUST TAKE PLACE IN AN "HONDURAN" CONTEXT. SUCH A VAGUE, UNDEFINED CONCEPT CAN BE USED TO JUSTIFY VIRTUALLY ANY POLICY OR ACTION. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT "HONDURAN" IS MORE A SLOGAN THAN A WELL CONCEIVED COURSE OF GOVERNMENT ACTION, BUT IS USEFUL TO THE GROUP IN AVOIDING DEFINITIONS WHICH MIGHT CREATE INTERNAL DIVISIONS AND DISSENSION.

6. IT IS PROBABLE THAT THE NEW GROUP WILL FIND ITSELF CONFRONTED WITH A SERIES OF POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS THAT IT WILL BE FORCED TO DEAL WITH ALMOST IMMEDIATELY. GIVEN THE FACT THAT THE GROUP HAS NO COMMON IDEOLOGY, THEY WILL HAVE NO CLEAR GUIDEPOSTS TO CHANNEL THEIR ACTIONS AND DECISIONS. IN ADDITION, THEY ARE YOUNG OFFICERS WHO ARE NOT EXPERIENCED IN DEALING WITH GOVERNMENTAL PROBLEMS. SUCH A SITUATION MAY LEAD THE GROUP TO TAKE PRECIPITATE DECISIONS WITHOUT ADEQUATE CONSIDERATION OF ALL THE FACTORS INVOLVED IN COMPLEX GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES. A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO MOST PROBLEMS CAN BE EXPECTED BUT AGREEMENT ON SOLUTIONS IS NOT LIELY
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TO COME EASILY. THE NITTY-GRITTY DECISIONS OF DAILY GOVERNMENT ARE LIKELY TO SOON BREAK DOWN THE VAGUE CONSENSUS THAT PRESENTLY UNIFIES THE LT. COLONELS. IN ANY CASE, THE PROBLEMS INHERENT IN ANY COLLEGIAL TYPE GOVERNMENT WILL CERTAINLY BE PRESENT HERE. THIS WILL GIVE URGENCY AND GREAT SIGNIFICANCE TO A TIMELY DECISION BY THEM ON THE MANNER IN WHICH LOPEZ IS TO BE REPLACED.
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